

Stress and Intonation in the Expression of Communicative Meaning in English and Uzbek: A Comparative Pragmalinguistic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a comparative analysis of the pragmatic functions of stress and intonation in English and Uzbek, their role in communicative interaction, and their significance from the perspective of translation studies. It examines the phonological characteristics of stress and intonation as suprasegmental units of language, with particular emphasis on their capacity to distinguish meaning, highlight the importance of information, and convey the speaker's communicative intention and emotional state. The study analyzes the types and phonological structures of stress and intonation in English and Uzbek, identifies their similarities and differences, and explores their pragmatic functions in ensuring the effectiveness of speech acts. Particular attention is also paid to the role of stressed units in shaping the semantic content of utterances, enhancing communicative expressiveness, and ensuring the effectiveness of interpersonal communication. The findings of the comparative analysis contribute to identifying both universal and culture- or language-specific features in the expression of pragmatic meanings through stress and intonation. They also demonstrate the theoretical and practical significance of prosodic features for foreign language teaching, translation, phonological research, and the development of effective speech culture.

Keywords: Stress, intonation, pragmatics, pragmatic function, suprasegmental units, phonology, phonetic devices, communicative intention, speech act, emotional state,

information stress, English, Uzbek, comparative analysis, translation studies, speech culture.

INTRODUCTION

At present, among the issues actively investigated in the field of phonetics, the relationship between spoken and written discourse occupies one of the priority positions. One of the major factors that may hinder the adequate transposition of a text from its written form into spoken discourse is “monotony,” that is, the absence of minimal syntactically significant variation in the realization of the main prosodic parameters of speech. This refers to the pronunciation of words at the same pitch level, without contrastive changes in speech rate, intensity, or pitch movement. Such prosodic characteristics may make speech more difficult for the listener to comprehend, reduce the amount of information successfully conveyed to the listener, and, in some cases, result in distortion of the meaning of the utterance.

To avoid such an undesirable effect, the speaker should ensure that variations in the principal prosodic parameters of speech most importantly, pausing, pitch movement, speech rate, intensity, and pitch-range characteristics are sufficiently distinct and perceptible. One of the suprasegmental phenomena that contributes to achieving a high degree of expressiveness in speech is word accent (accent). Through word accent, a particular syllable within an utterance is highlighted by a sudden change in the melodic contour, accompanied by an increase in intensity and duration [1: 89-92].

The term “accent” was introduced to describe this phenomenon in 1958 by the American phonetician Dwight Bolinger in his article entitled ‘A Theory of Pitch Accent in English.’ The scholar proposed distinguishing between syllable stress (stress) and word accent (accent). In this context, the term stress (syllable stress) is used “when referring to different degrees of prominence of a syllable within a word, as indicated in the most authoritative dictionaries” [2: 83-96].

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

With regard to the term accent (word accent), the author points out that its meaning “clearly goes beyond the bounds of separate syllables and pertains to the realm of words” [1: 97-105]. From this perspective, in Bolinger’s interpretation, “stress” primarily refers to the degree of phonetic prominence assigned to a particular syllable within a word, whereas “accent” represents a broader concept encompassing the functional and prosodic characteristics of prominence at the word level.

The material selected for the study and examined both auditorily and by means of instrumental phonetic analysis provides grounds for distinguishing two types of word accent in the American variety of English. These may be provisionally designated as “word accent 1” (accent 1) and “word accent 2” (accent 2). Within each of these two types of accent, both marked and unmarked variants can be distinguished.

Both variants of “word accent 1.” although such a comparison should be made with due caution, may be regarded as a specific “analogue” of the high-falling tone, which constitutes one of the means of expressing word accent in the British variety of English [3: 18-26].

In contemporary linguistics, the investigation of the phonetic characteristics of speech, particularly the communicative and pragmatic functions of stress and intonation, has emerged as one of the significant areas of research. Stress and intonation constitute essential components of the prosodic system of speech, as they not only contribute to the phonetic realization of linguistic units but also convey the speaker’s communicative purpose, attitude, evaluation, and emotional state. From this perspective, within pragmatic linguistics, stress and intonation are regarded as important prosodic units that influence both the formation of the meaning of an utterance and its accurate interpretation by the listener.

The processes of globalization and the intensification of cross-linguistic communication in the modern world have increased the need to investigate the prosodic systems of Uzbek and English from comparative-typological and communicative-

pragmatic perspectives. In these languages, stress and intonation exhibit distinctive features in terms of their phonetic nature, distribution, functional properties, and semantic-pragmatic load in speech. In particular, stress in English is relatively mobile, and its placement and prominence may, in certain contexts, serve to actualize communicative meaning, highlight the most important part of information, and determine the pragmatic orientation of an utterance. In Uzbek, by contrast, word stress tends to occur predominantly on the final syllable, while intonation plays a significant role in expressing the communicative type of an utterance, modal meaning, and its emotional-expressive and stylistic characteristics.

In English linguistics, the pragmatics of stress and intonation has been extensively investigated in the scholarly works of such prominent linguists as D. Crystal, P. Roach, J. Wells & L. Ladefoged. In particular, D. Crystal interprets stress and intonation as prosodic means that contribute to the differentiation of utterance meaning and the expression of the speaker's attitude. P. Roach, in turn, highlights the semantic and pragmatic significance of stress in English and emphasizes its direct relationship with the information structure of the sentence. These studies particularly acknowledge the role of intonation in conveying interrogative and declarative meanings, doubt, emphasis, and emotional states.

In Uzbek linguistics, the issues of stress and intonation have been investigated by scholars such as Abdurahmonov, Hojiyev, Sh. Rahmatullayev & Mirtojiev. Their works provide a comprehensive analysis of the tendency of stress in Uzbek to occur predominantly toward the end of the word, as well as the role of intonation in clarifying and specifying utterance meaning. Furthermore, scholars have theoretically substantiated the predominantly emotional-expressive and stylistic functions of intonation in the Uzbek language [4: 203].

Within the framework of pragmatic linguistics, the Speech Act Theory developed by J. Austin and J. Searle provides a theoretical basis for explaining the significance of stress and intonation in the expression of communicative intentions. From this perspective, stress and intonation can be regarded as

prosodic resources that enhance the effectiveness of speech acts and contribute to the successful realization of the speaker's communicative purpose.

In contemporary linguistic research, the discourse-level functions of stress and intonation are also receiving increasing scholarly attention. In particular, their role in structuring information, marking communicative focus, expressing the speaker's attitude and evaluation, conveying emotional and modal meanings, and facilitating the contextual interpretation of utterances is being examined from communicative-pragmatic and discourse-oriented perspectives [4: 203].

Taking these differences in the prosodic systems of Uzbek and English into account is of particular methodological importance in the process of foreign language teaching and learning. This is because the improper use of stress and intonation may result not only in phonetic errors, but also in distortions of the communicative meaning and pragmatic interpretation of speech. In particular, the emergence of prosodic interference in the process of English language acquisition by learners whose native language is Uzbek directly affects the effectiveness of communication.

In recent years, the scope of research on stress and intonation has expanded beyond the traditional boundaries of phonetics and phonology and has increasingly been examined from the perspectives of pragmatics, discourse analysis, communicative linguistics, and cognitive approaches. However, comprehensive comparative studies devoted to the communicative and pragmatic functions of stress and intonation in Uzbek and English have not yet been sufficiently developed. In particular, investigating the role of prosodic features in shaping the speaker's intention, communicative focus, emotional expressiveness, modal meaning, and contextual interpretation on the basis of data from both languages constitutes one of the important scholarly issues in contemporary linguistics.

From this perspective, a comparative study of the phonetic and pragmatic characteristics of stress and intonation in Uzbek and English, as well as the identification of their functional potential in shaping the meaning of speech and realizing

communicative intentions, is consistent with the theoretical and practical needs of contemporary linguistics. This issue determines the scientific-theoretical and practical relevance of the research topic.

In both English and Uzbek, stress is one of the important phonetic phenomena that plays a significant role in the prosodic organization of speech. Stress ensures the phonetic prominence of a particular syllable or linguistic unit within a word or utterance in relation to other components. Its acoustic realization involves such parameters as fundamental frequency (F0), intensity, duration, loudness, and articulatory tension. At the same time, stress manifests itself not merely as a phonetic phenomenon, but also as a prosodic means of expressing the semantic structure of an utterance, its communicative focus, and the pragmatic intention of the speaker.

In English, stress is relatively free and mobile in nature, meaning that it may fall on different syllables within a word. The prominence of stress in English is often realized through complex variations in several acoustic parameters: a stressed syllable is typically pronounced with greater intensity, longer duration, and greater articulatory clarity, while its pitch may also vary. For example, in 'PREsent (noun/adjective) and pre'SENT (verb), the different placement of stress results in a change in the grammatical category. Similarly, in the pairs 'REcord “a written record, a recording” and re'CORD “to record,” the shift in stress placement serves to distinguish the lexical-grammatical meaning. Thus, in certain cases, stress in English performs a distinctive function, contributing to the differentiation of meaning [5: 885-887].

The functional potential of stress in English is not limited to the word level. Phrasal and sentence stress play an important role in structuring the information content of an utterance. As a rule, independent lexical items within a sentence such as nouns, main verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and numerals are given greater prosodic prominence. Articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs, by contrast, are generally pronounced with weaker stress and may undergo phonetic reduction. For example:

The STUDENT bought a new BOOK.

In this sentence, STUDENT and BOOK may be highlighted as communicatively significant information centers. However, when the context changes, the placement of stress may also shift:

The student bought a NEW book.

In this case, the prosodic prominence assigned to NEW directs the listener's attention specifically to the information concerning the newness of the book. Thus, in English, phrasal stress performs the functions of marking communicative focus, highlighting new information, and specifying the speaker's communicative intention.

The pragmatic potential of stress can also be observed in the pronunciation of the same sentence in different prosodic forms. For example:

I didn't say he stole the money.

If stress is placed on I, the utterance may be interpreted as meaning "It was not me who said this." When prominence is assigned to HE, a semantic contrast arises, conveying the meaning "I did not say that it was he who stole the money." By contrast, emphasizing MONEY shifts the semantic focus of the utterance toward the concept of money. Thus, in English, stress can establish contrastive focus, giving rise to different pragmatic interpretations of the same syntactic structure.

The stress system of Uzbek differs from that of English in several respects. As a general tendency, word stress in Uzbek tends to fall on the final syllable. For example, in words such as *kitób*, *shahár*, and *muallím*, stress is generally realized toward the final syllable. However, it is not entirely justified, from a scholarly perspective, to interpret Uzbek stress as an absolutely "fixed stress" system. This is because the placement of stress may vary under the influence of certain grammatical forms, particles, loanwords, and morphological structures.

The agglutinative morphological characteristics of Uzbek are also directly associated with the placement of stress. When suffixes are successively added to a word, stress generally tends to shift toward the newly added final morpheme. For example:

kitób → kitoblár → kitoblarimíz

In this sequence, the gradual shift of stress toward the final suffix demonstrates the interaction between stress placement and morphological structure in Uzbek. A similar pattern can be observed in forms such as:

bola → bolalár → bolalarimíz → bolalarimizgá

In these forms, stress varies in accordance with the morphemic structure of the word. However, not all suffixes attract stress. Therefore, the stress system of Uzbek cannot be adequately explained solely by the general rule that “stress falls on the final syllable.”

The communicative and pragmatic properties of stress in Uzbek are particularly evident through contrastive stress. For example:

MEN bugun universitetga bordim.

In this sentence, placing stress on MEN contrasts the person performing the action with other possible individuals. Thus, the semantic-pragmatic meaning “It was I, not someone else, who went” is conveyed. If stress is placed on BUGUN, the temporal component is highlighted:

Men BUGUN universitetga bordim.

In this case, a contrastive meaning is established, conveying the sense “today, not yesterday or tomorrow.” Similarly, prosodic prominence on UNIVERSITETGA brings the direction or destination of the action into communicative focus:

Men bugun UNIVERSITETGA bordim.

Thus, in Uzbek as well, the placement and degree of stress, depending on the context, contribute to the formation of the information center, contrast, emphasis, and communicative focus of an utterance.

Another important aspect of stress in both English and Uzbek is its interaction with intonation. Although stress and intonation are distinct phenomena, they are closely interconnected in actual speech. A stressed syllable often becomes the center of pitch movement within an intonational contour. For example, in the English sentence:

You are coming.

The placement of primary stress and the movement of pitch contribute to the formation of the utterance's declarative meaning. When the same structure is pronounced with a different prosodic contour:

You are COMING?

It may convey pragmatic meanings such as surprise, doubt, or a request for confirmation.

In Uzbek, the interaction between intonation and stress is likewise important in shaping communicative meaning. For example:

Siz keldingiz. And Siz KELDINGIZ.

Although these utterances have the same lexical and grammatical structure, a shift in the location of the stress center results in a change in communicative focus. In the first case, the subject is highlighted, whereas in the second, the action itself is emphasized. Therefore, prosodic features determine not only the phonetic realization of an utterance but also its contextual and pragmatic interpretation.

The cross-linguistic comparison demonstrates that although English and Uzbek share a number of common functional properties of stress such as prominence, emphasis, contrast

formation, marking communicative focus, and structural organization of information their phonetic realization and status within the respective systems differ considerably. In English, stress is characterized by relatively free placement, its potential to distinguish lexical and grammatical meanings, and the active role of phrasal stress in structuring information. In Uzbek, by contrast, stress is characterized by its tendency to fall on the final syllable, its potential to shift in relation to morphological affixation, and its interaction with intonation in expressing emphasis, contrast, and emotional-expressive meanings.

These differences are also significant from the perspective of phonetic interference. Among learners of English whose native language is Uzbek, the transfer of Uzbek stress placement patterns and prosodic habits into English speech may result in such phenomena as incorrect stress placement, insufficient prominence of phrasal stress, or speech monotony. Conversely, the stress and intonational characteristics of English require Uzbek-speaking learners to develop new prosodic patterns in the process of acquiring English as a second language.

Table 1. *Comparative analysis of the pragmatic functions of stress and intonation in English and Uzbek*

S. No.	Pragmatic Feature	Manifestation in English	Manifestation in Uzbek	Pragmatic Meaning and Function
1.	Marking communicative focus.	The student bought a NEW book.	<i>Men bugun UNIVERSITETGA bordim.</i>	Prosodic prominence directs the listener's attention toward a particular component of the utterance. In English, phrasal stress plays a prominent role, while in Uzbek, stress interacts closely with intonation in marking focus [6: 189].
2.	Contrastive stress	I didn't say he stole the money.	<i>MEN bugun universitetga bordim</i>	The emphasized constituent is contrasted with alternative referents, conveying meanings such as "I, not someone else" or "this particular person."
3.	Highlighting new information	The student bought a NEW book.	<i>Men BUGUN universitetga bordim.</i>	Stress highlights information that is new, salient, or particularly relevant within the communicative context.

4.	Emphasis	I REALLY like this book.	<i>Men buni JUDA yaxshi ko'raman.</i>	Increased prosodic prominence signals the speaker's intention to emphasize a particular lexical or semantic element.
5.	Lexical-grammatical distinction	'PREsent (noun/adjective) – pre'SENT (verb); 'REcord – re'CORD	Such stress-based distinctions are not systematically characteristic of Uzbek.	In English, stress may function distinctively by differentiating lexical items or grammatical categories.
6.	Marking utterance type through intonation	You are coming. ↘ / You are coming? ↗	<i>Siz keldingiz. ↘ / Siz keldingiz? ↗</i>	Variations in intonation may distinguish declarative and interrogative interpretations even when the lexical and grammatical structure remains unchanged.
7.	Encoding communicative intention	I did tell him.	<i>Men unga AYTDIM.</i>	Stress and intonation enable the speaker to express intentions such as confirmation, denial, clarification, insistence, or correction.
8.	Emotional and expressive meaning	That was AMAZING!	<i>Bu AJOYIB ekan!</i>	Changes in stress, pitch, intensity, and overall intonational contour may convey emotions such as joy, surprise, dissatisfaction, or anger.
9.	Enhancing communicative effectiveness	Stress, intonation, and rhythm jointly identify information structure and communicative prominence.	Stress, intonation, and pausing jointly highlight informationally significant elements.	The integrated functioning of prosodic features contributes to the accurate transmission of information and the listener's adequate interpretation of the speaker's communicative intention.

In general, the comparative study of stress in English and Uzbek is not limited to identifying the phonetic and phonological systems of these languages; it also makes it possible to reveal the communicative, pragmatic, and discourse-related functions of stress. The complex interaction of prosodic features such as stress, intonation, pausing, and speech rate contributes to the semantic coherence of speech, the accurate transmission of information, and the listener's adequate interpretation of the speaker's intention. Therefore, the comparative-pragmatic investigation of stress in English and Uzbek is of considerable

theoretical and practical significance for contemporary phonetics, phonology, communicative linguistics, and foreign language teaching methodology.

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